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THE TEMPORAL DURABILITY OF SHAKESPEARE'S OTHELLO IN ITS MUSICAL REWRITINGS

Keywords: *durability, musical dramaturgy, dichotomy, race, religion, sexuality, otherness.*

Abstract: *This paper looks at the tragic vein in Shakespeare's Othello as a fruitful source for operatic exploitation. The study compares the bard's play and two of the operas it inspired across cultural borders, composed by Rossini and Verdi. It shows how the rigours of the operatic tradition imposed various transformations from spoken to sung language, entailing a dramatic metamorphosis which results in the alteration of the plot and the reduction of the number of acts and characters. Another central issue is that of translation and adaptation. The power and effect of Shakespeare's language are weighed in the light of Frank Kermode's theories against the foreign librettists' solutions. From a thematic point of view, this study analyses a number of disquieting black-and-white dichotomies, mainly regarding race, sexuality (Valerie Traub), religion and the occult. The realm of opera provides the possibility of increasing the dramatic tension and the ability of outlining characters through the means germane to music: tonal structure, rhythm, timbre, vocal virtuosity, etc. The paper analyses how the felicitous entwinement between dramatic warp and musical invention in the operas determines their temporal durability or transience, concluding that the otherness of these variants is enriching, increasing the fame, popularity and durability of Shakespeare's tragedy.*